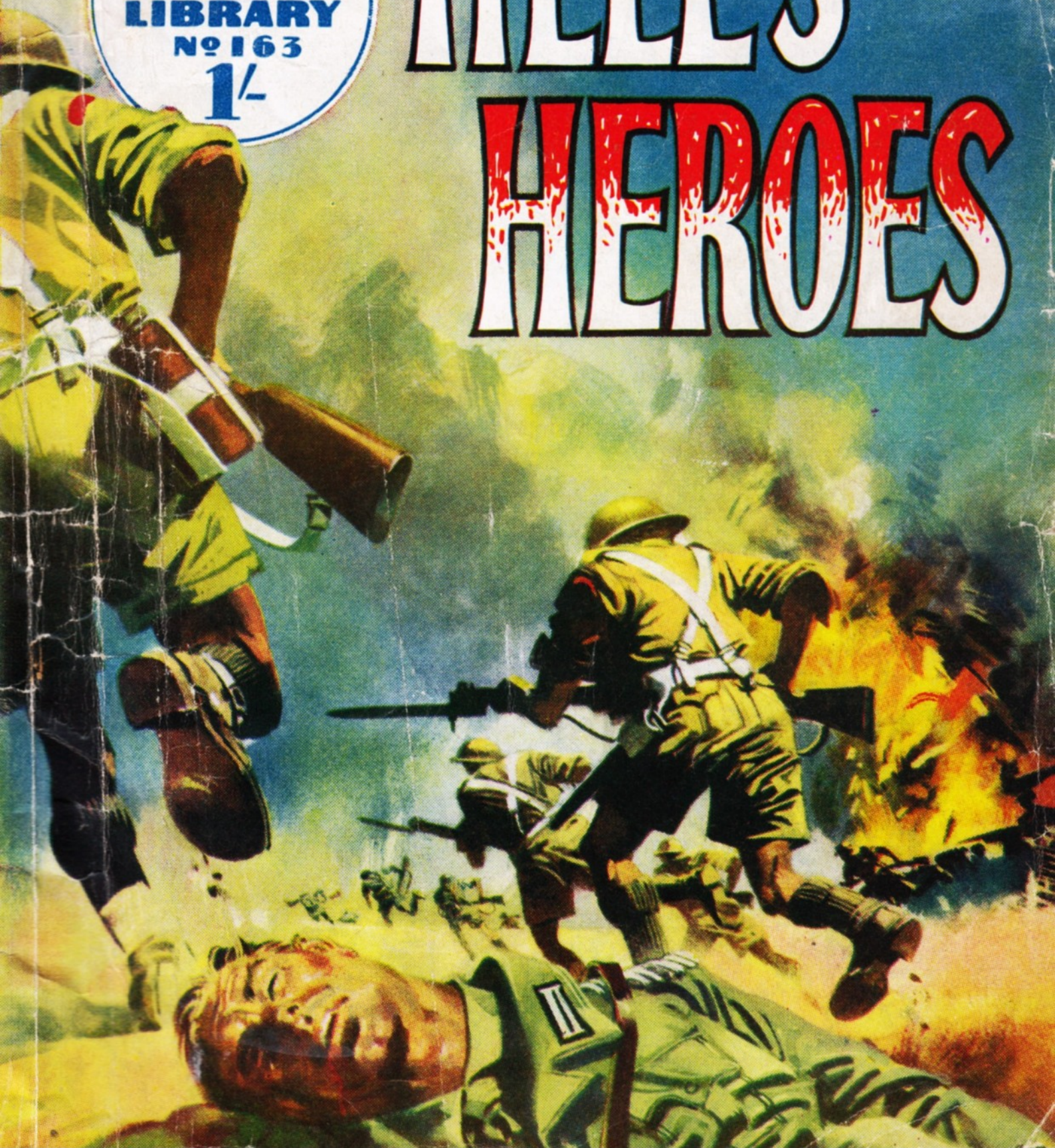
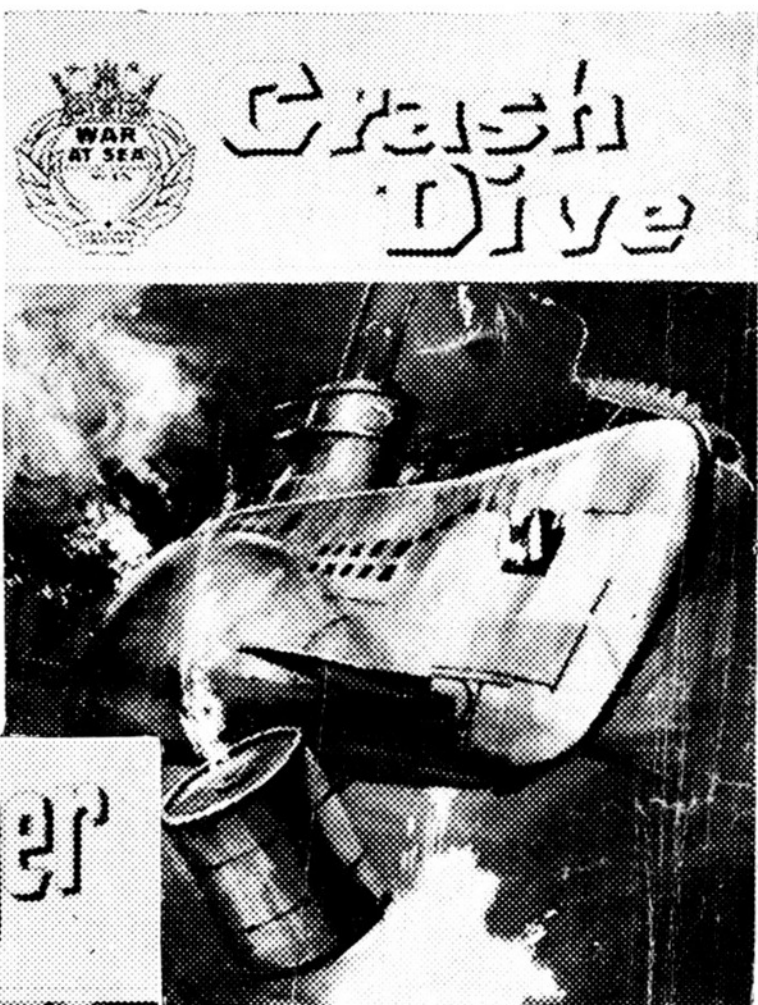


# HELL'S HEROES





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# HELL'S HEROES

HE WAS A HARD CASE, ROUGH, TOUGH AND HORNY-HANDED. HE SPOKE THE SAME LANGUAGE AS THE DIGGERS IN THE RANKS, WITH HIS TONGUE AND HIS FISTS. HE WAS A BORN LEADER OF MEN...





## Chapter 1. Breakthrough

IN MAY 1942, THE PENDULUM OF THE WAR IN THE DESERT SWUNG BACK IN FAVOUR OF THE GERMANS. THE EIGHTH ARMY HAD OVER-REACHED ITSELF IN THE LAST ADVANCE TO GAZALA. NOW ROMMEL FORCED THEM TO RETREAT...



THE FOURTH BATTALION, 216TH QUEENSLAND MILITIA, AUSTRALIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, WAS HOLDING A BOX SOUTH-EAST OF GAZALA WHEN THE AFRIKA KORPS STRUCK WITH TANKS AND INFANTRY AT DAWN...





BEHIND 'D' COMPANY'S WEAPON PITS, A BIG MAN IN A STAINED SHIRT CLIMBED OUT OF A COMMAND TRUCK. HE HOOKED HIS PISTOL INTO HIS CALLOUSED HAND...



HECK! CAN'T YOU SEE ENOUGH FROM HERE, RUDGE?

I CAN SEE... BUT I WANT TO GET STUCK IN WITH THE BLOKES, SARGE...

SIX PLATOON'S BREN WAS HAMMERING FROM THE LEFT WING OF THE BOX AS THE BIG MAN HEADED TOWARDS THE GUN-PITS.



SAY, BRAD, OLD RUDGE IS HERE! TRUST HIM!

YEAH... I DO... CHUCK US A NEW MAGAZINE, GIL...

THE GERMAN MARK III PANZERS WERE CRUISING ALONG THE LINE, RAKING THE AUSTRALIAN TRENCHES WITH THEIR MACHINE-GUNS. ONE OF THE GERMANS HAD HIS HEAD OUT OF THE TANK CUPOLA TILL AN AUSTRALIAN MARKSMAN SPOTTED IT...



SEE THAT, SARGE... THAT LOOKED LIKE SLOANEY'S WORK TO ME...

YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT, RUDGE. HE'S THE ONLY JOKER THAT COULD HAVE PULLED OFF A SHOT LIKE THAT!



PRIVATE SLOAN WAS A DARK LITTLE MAN FROM CHARLEVILLE. HE HAD A SNIPER'S EYE. RUDGE'S VOICE MADE HIM GRIN.



THEY TALKED TO THE BIG MAN AS THEY TALKED TO THEIR MATES. THAT WAS WHAT RUDGE WAS, ONE OF THEIR MATES.





MOST OF THE FOURTH BATTALION'S MILITIAMEN CAME FROM THE QUEENSLAND OUTBACK. THEY WERE A TOUGH LOT, NOT OVERFOND OF OFFICERS.

JERRY'S GOT INTO C COMPANY'S TRENCH, MEN... WE'LL HAVE TO FLUSH THEM OUT... FIX BAYONETS...

TALK SENSE, LOOT, THEY GOT A MARK THREE BLASTING DOWN THE PARAPETS THERE. WE'D NEVER MAKE IT ALIVE, AND DOOLEY AIN'T AIMING TO CROAK YET...



RUDGE WAS AN OFFICER, BUT RUDGE WAS DIFFERENT...

I HEARD THAT, DOOLEY. CHUCK YOUR BAYONET OVER. YOU WON'T BE NEEDING IT AFTER I'VE FINISHED DUSTING THE FLOOR WITH YOU...

I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN YOU'D TURN UP, RUDGE MATE... HAVE IT YOUR WAY. COME ON, BLOKES, FIX BAYONETS...





CORPORAL DOOLEY WAS FIRST OUT OF THE TRENCH BESIDE RUDGE. THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT FOUND HIMSELF BESIDE THE BIG MAN'S DRIVER, SERGEANT TESTER.

THREE OF YOU  
FIX THAT TANK.  
THE REST STICK  
WITH ME...

I WISH I COULD  
HANDLE THE MEN  
LIKE RUDGE DOES,  
SERGEANT...

YEAH... WELL  
YOU'D NEED BIG  
HORNY HANDS,  
LIEUTENANT, AND  
A BIG HEART.



THE GERMANS HAD OCCUPIED 'C' COMPANY'S TRENCH IN PLATOON STRENGTH. THEY WERE JAMMED IN TOO TIGHTLY TO USE THEIR GUNS WHEN DOOLEY'S SECTION HIT THEM.

GET STUCK  
IN, BLOKES!

AA-AGH!  
TEUFEL!





THREE MEN HAD CRAMMED GRENADES INTO THE TURRET OF THE MARK III. IT BREWED UP AS THE AUSSIES FLOODED INTO THE CROWDED TRENCH...

BLOCK 'EM OFF AT YOUR END, DOOLEY, MATE...

OKAY, RUDGE...

AAACH!

RUDGE HAD BEEN FIGHTING THIS WAY FOR THREE YEARS, SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE RANKERS IN THE HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT THAT CAME THEIR WAY.

THEY'RE SURRENDERING, RUDGE...

GOOD ON YOU, COBBERS!

RUDGE HAD BEEN A RANKER HIMSELF IN 'D' COMPANY AT ABBEVILLE IN 1940. HE HAD WON HIS FIRST STRIPES THERE...

ANY ORDERS, SIR?

JUST KEEP ON FIGHTING, LIEUTENANT, THAT'S WHAT WE'VE GOT TO DO. COME ON, SARGE... WE'D BETTER GET BACK...





COLONEL MACK HAD GIVEN RUDGE HIS FIRST PIPS AFTER THE BATTALION HAD BEEN BLOODED IN THE DESERT WAR AT SIDI BARRANI IN DECEMBER OF 1940.

TRANSPORT'S OKAY, RUDGE, IN CASE WE HAVE TO PULL OUT...

WE'LL HAVE TO PULL OUT ALL RIGHT, SARGE, IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME!



COLONEL MACK, THE FOURTH'S COMMANDER, GREETED RUDGE WITH A SMILE...

IT'S NO USE, COLONEL. THE SIGNAL FROM BRIGADE H.Q. SAYS THE GERMANS ARE ALL AROUND US. WE HAVE NO CHOICE. THERE'S NO WAY OUT...

LET'S HEAR WHAT MAJOR RUDGE HAS TO SAY...



RUDGE HAD BEEN THE COLONEL'S RIGHT-HAND MAN SINCE HALFAYA FIVE MONTHS BEFORE. THEY WERE BOTH BORN SOLDIERS. THEY UNDERSTOOD EACH OTHER...



WELL, MAJOR RUDGE? YOU'VE HEARD THE FACTS...

LOOK, PYM - WE'VE GOT THE TRUCKS AND THE MEN TO PUNCH THEM THROUGH THE JERRIES. NO-ONE'S GOING TO BOTTLE UP THE FOURTH WHILE I'M AROUND...

COLONEL MACK SMILED AT THE BIG MAN. HE WAS STILL TALKING WHEN THE WHINE OF THE AERO ENGINES DROWNED HIS VOICE...

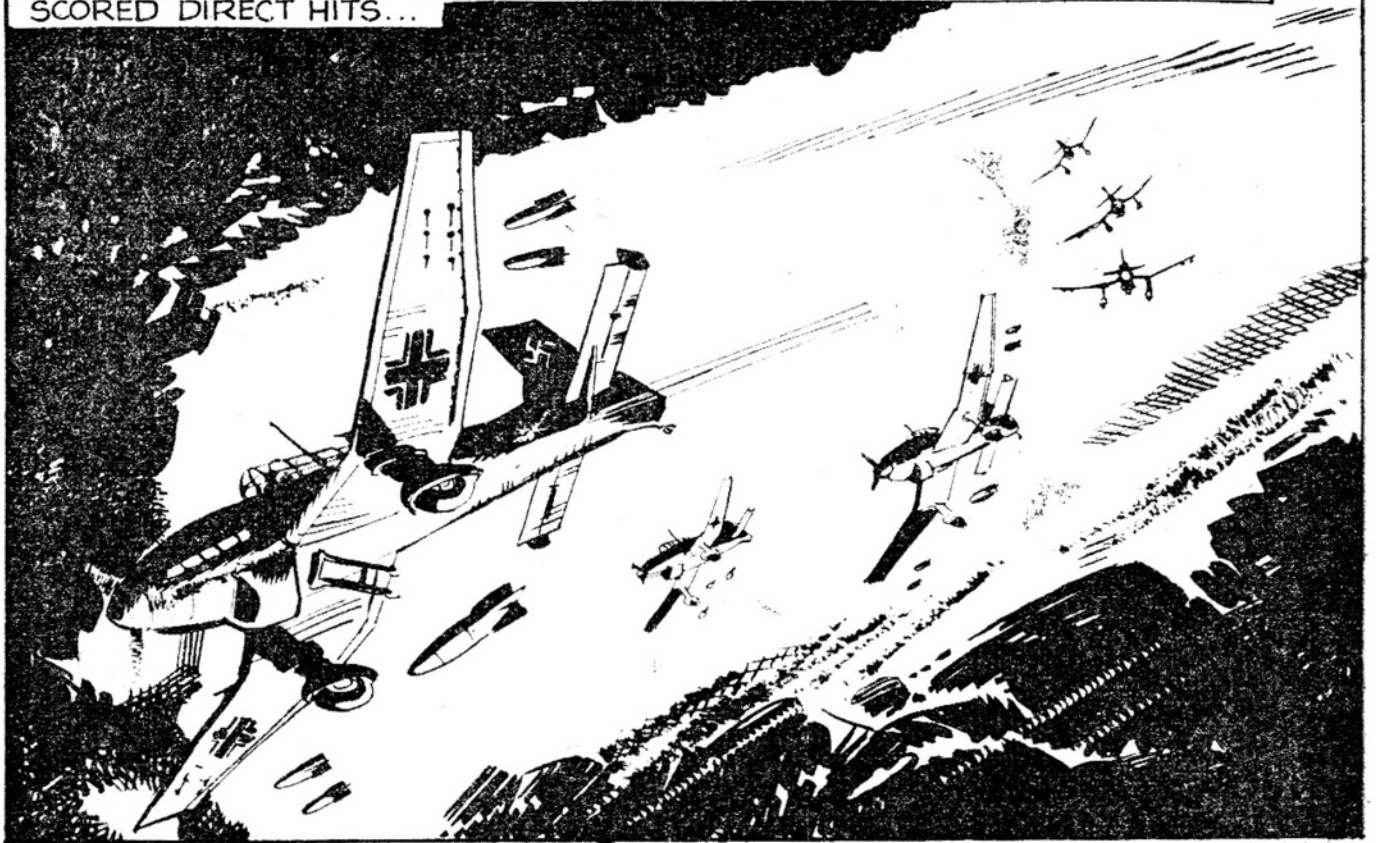


MY SENTIMENTS EXACTLY, RUDGE. ALL RIGHT, GENTLEMEN, LET US ADMIT THAT THE FOURTH IS SURROUNDED BY A RING OF GERMAN STEEL...

SIR - STUKAS!



SIX JUNKERS EIGHTY-SEVENS CAME DOWN IN A VICIOUS STEEP DIVE, THEIR BOMBS BURSTING AS THEY FLATTENED OUT ABOVE THE H.Q. TWO OF THEM SCORED DIRECT HITS...



THE SHATTERED H.Q. DUG-OUT WAS FULL OF SMOKE AND DUST. THE COLONEL SLUMPED AGAINST RUDGE, A DEADWEIGHT...



HE'S STOPPED A PACKET - LET'S GET HIM OUT OF HERE!

AAAGH!

COLONEL!

THE TRUCK-MOUNTED BRENS WERE HAMMERING AT THE WHEELING PLANES AS THE OFFICERS STUMBLED OUT OF THE WRECKED DUG-OUT...



LET'S GET HIM TO THE CLEARING STATION, RUDGE!

NO—LISTEN, RUDGE—THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME—

THAT WAS HOW RUDGE GOT HIS COMMAND—FROM THE LIPS OF A DYING MAN IN THE MIDDLE OF A STRAFING...



THE BATTALION... IT'S YOURS, RUDGE. I'M HANDING OVER COMMAND TO YOU. YOU HEAR ME... COLONEL RUDGE!

I'LL SEE THEM THROUGH.



THE STUKAS HAD PULLED AWAY NOW. IT WAS VERY QUIET. IF RUDGE HEARD THE WHISPER FROM CAPTAIN PYM, HE GAVE NO SIGN...

GOOD GRIEF! RANKER TO COLONEL IN TWO YEARS... AND RUDGE'S STILL A RANKER IN EVERYTHING BUT NAME. OLD MACK MUST HAVE BEEN KNOCKED SILLY BY THAT BOMB...

NOT SO LOUD, CAPTAIN...



RUDGE STOOD UP, BIG AND GAUNT OVER THE BODY OF HIS DEAD COMMANDER. HIS WORDS WERE THE ROUGH WORDS OF A RANKER, BUT THE VOICE HAD THE AUTHORITY OF A COLONEL...

WE'RE NOT SURRENDERING, MATES. AT DUSK WE'RE GOING TO PILE INTO THE TRUCKS AND BASH OUR WAY THROUGH THE JERRY LINES. OKAY?

ER... YES. OKAY... COLONEL.



THE OFFICERS OF THE FOURTH HAD THEIR DOUBTS ABOUT THEIR NEW COLONEL. THE MEN, BATTERED AND WEARY, HAD NONE.

SHOVE A LEWIS GUN IN EACH TRUCK, PYM. DRIVERS, RAM YOUR FEET HARD DOWN AND GO LIKE MAD!

OLD RUDGE MAY BE A COLONEL NOW. BUT HIS MANNERS AIN'T IMPROVED...

YOU CAN KEEP YOUR MANNERS, COBBER... I'D FOLLOW RUDGE SMACK THROUGH HELL...



C COMPANY HAD BEEN OVERRUN ON THE PERIMETER THAT MORNING. THE SURVIVORS OF THE OTHER THREE COMPANIES PILED INTO THE TRUCKS. RUDGE JOINED THEM...

YOUR CAR'S READY, COLONEL. WE'VE BOXED IT IN WITH TRUCKS TO GIVE IT PROTECTION.

I DON'T NEED PROTECTION, PYM. I'LL MAKE THE TRIP WITH THE BLOKES.

GOOD ON YOU, RUDGE MATE...





FIVE MILES AWAY ACROSS THE BLACK SAND, THE GERMAN ARMoured RING HAD BEEN CLAMPED SHUT AROUND THE AUSTRALIANS. THE ENEMY OFFICERS YAWNED COMPLACENTLY...

AT DAWN WE WILL MOVE IN AND MOP THEM UP, MAJOR. I DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY UNDUE TROUBLE. NOW I WILL GET SOME SLEEP...

YOU HAVE EARNED YOUR REST, HERR OBERST!

ACH!  
WAS IS  
DAS?

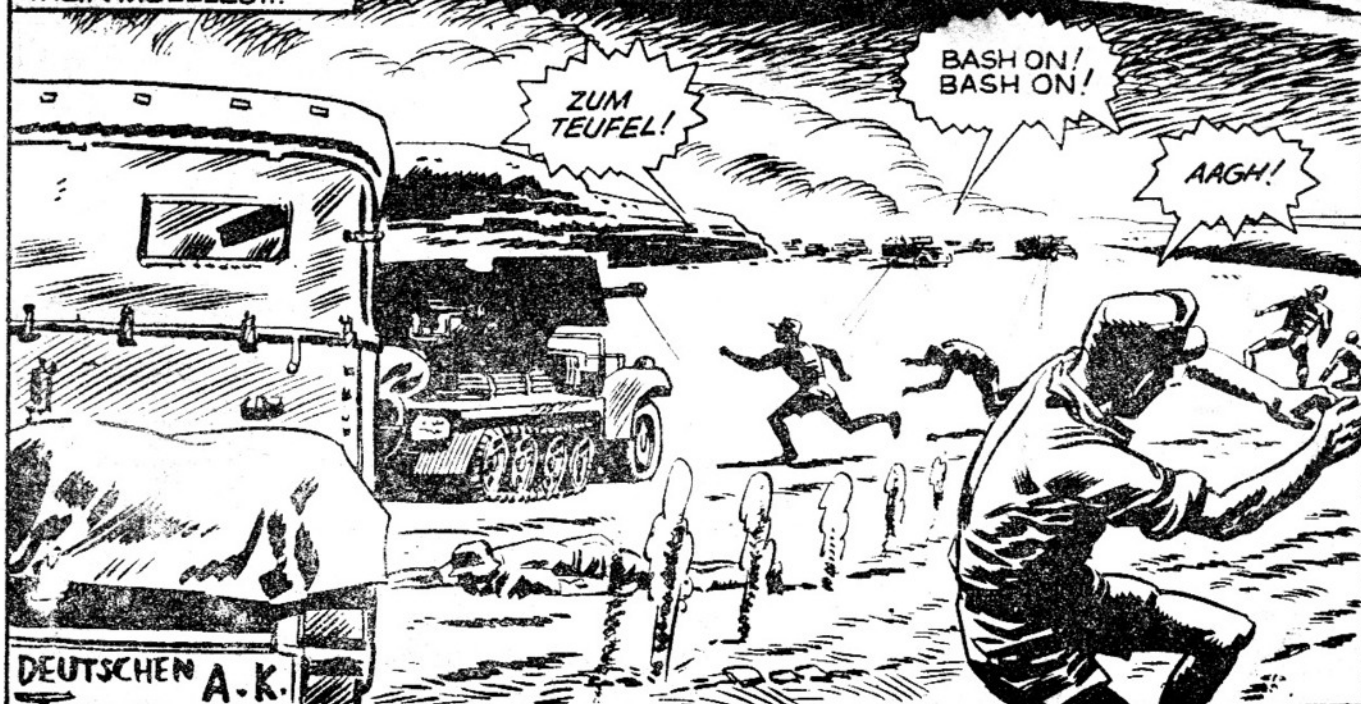


THE TRUCKS OF THE FOURTH HIT THE GERMAN LINES AT FIFTY MILES AN HOUR. THEIR BRENS AND LEWIS GUNS WERE BLAZING, AND THE HOT DARKNESS FANNED BACK FROM THEIR MUZZLES...

ZUM  
TEUFEL!

BASH ON!  
BASH ON!

AAGH!



THE GERMAN LINE WAS STUDDED WITH TANKS AND GUNS. BUT THE AUSTRALIAN BREAKTHROUGH WAS TOO FAST, TOO DETERMINED.



THE TRUCKS SCREAMED PAST SLIT TRENCHES AND GUN NESTS. A FEW OF THEM WERE HIT AS THE GERMANS BLAZED AWAY OVER OPEN SIGHTS. THE REST PUNCHED THROUGH...





SUDDENLY, THE FIGHTING AND THE DYING WAS BEHIND THEM, AND THE TRUCKS OF THE FOURTH RAN FREE IN THE WINDY DARKNESS OF THE DESERT...

OKAY, BLOKES.  
KEEP GOING.  
CRUISING SPEED...

I'LL RADIO BRIGADE  
WHEN WE BIVOUAC, COLONEL.  
THEY'LL WANT TO KNOW  
ABOUT OUR BREAKOUT  
AND OUR CHANGE OF  
COMMAND...

ACTING-COLONEL RUDGE  
HAD WON HIS FIRST  
BATTLE. BUT HE HAD A  
LOT OF FIGHTING AHEAD  
OF HIM...

BEGINNERS  
LUCK ... EH,  
GORDON?

GIVE RUDGE A CHANCE,  
CAPTAIN. MAYBE YOU'LL  
THANK YOUR STARS YOU'VE  
GOT A COLONEL LIKE HIM  
BEFORE THIS DESERT  
BATTLE TURNS OUR WAY  
AGAIN...

WE'LL LEAGUER  
HERE, MEN...  
I RECKON YOU'VE  
EARNED YOURSELVES  
A KIP...



## Chapter 2. *Relieved of Command*

WITH ITS GAZALA LINE TORN OPEN BY ROMMEL'S COUNTER-ATTACK, THE EIGHTH ARMY FELL BACK. DRIVING TOWARDS THE FRONT, DAYS LATER, BRIGADIER DWYER PASSED A LONG LINE OF SANDCAKED GUN QUADS HEADING EAST...

THINGS LOOK PRETTY DODGY, SIR, DON'T YOU THINK?

UNCERTAIN IS THE WORD, CHALMERS. THE GERMAN ADVANCE DOES NOT WARRANT YOUR JETTISONING THE KING'S ENGLISH!

A DEFENSIVE SCREEN HAD BEEN THROWN AROUND TOBRUK ON THE ACROMA-ELADEM LINE. BRIGADIER DWYER FOUND THE UNIT HE WAS LOOKING FOR IN THAT AREA.

GOOD GRIEF... NO PASSWORD... NO SALUTE... DARNED SLOVENLY!

CAN YOU TELL US WHERE THE FOURTH BATTALION, TWO ONE SIX MILITIA, IS, MY MAN?

SURE, COBBER... THAT'S US! BHQ'S RIGHT OVER THE RIDGE THERE!





# Hell's Heroes

AFTER ESCAPING THE NET AT GAZALA, THE SHRUNKEN FOURTH HAD BEEN ATTACHED TO DWYER'S BRIGADE. HE HAD DECIDED TO INSPECT THE BATTALION AND ITS NEW COMMANDER PERSONALLY...

CARRY ON, CHALMERS. I'LL HAVE A WORD WITH THESE FELLOWS BEFORE I MEET THIS COLONEL RUDGE. ONE CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT A COMMANDER FROM THE WAY HIS RANKERS BEHAVE...

VERY TRUE, SIR.



THERE WERE A DOZEN DIGGERS SQUATTING ON THE SAND IN THE SHADE OF A BIVVY-SHEET. THEY WERE PLAYING CARDS. THE BIGGEST OF THEM GLANCED CASUALLY AT THE BRIGADIER...

GOOD AFTERNOON, MEN. BATTALION HEADQUARTERS IS OVER THERE, IS IT?

ARE YOU ASKING OR TELLING US, COBBER?

COME ON, RUDGE, DEAL...



THE BIG MAN GOT UP LAZILY, DUSTING THE SAND OFF HIS PANTS. THE BRIGADIER BRISTLED ANGRILY...

RANK INSUBORDINATION! YOUR COLONEL SHALL HEAR ABOUT THIS...

HE KNOWS ALREADY, BRIG. THE NAME'S RUDGE...



BRIGADIER DWYER WAS AN EX-GUARDSMAN, A STICKLER FOR DISCIPLINE. HE LOOKED AT THE CROWN ON RUDGE'S STAINED SHIRT AND HIS EYES WIDENED...

YOU'RE RUDGE—GREAT SCOTT, MAN!

THE RED TAB'S BREWING UP, DOOLEY!

RUDGE CAN HANDLE HIM. GIVE ME A C.O. WHO TREATS THE BRASS LIKE HE TREATS HIS MEN, NO BETTER NO WORSE...





RUDGE WALKED BESIDE THE BRIGADIER. THE GERMANS WERE BEGINNING THEIR NOON BARRAGE OVER THE RIDGE. RUDGE IGNORED THE FIRST SHELL-BURST...

IT'S NO GOOD FOR DISCIPLINE TO FRATERNISE WITH YOUR MEN, RUDGE.

TO HECK WITH DISCIPLINE, BRIG. THAT'S NOT THE WAY WE FIGHT IN THIS OUTFIT. I RELAX WITH MY MEN, AND I FIGHT RIGHT ALONGSIDE 'EM, TOO!



THE SHELLS WERE COMING OVER FAST NOW. THE BIG MAN WENT ON TALKING, BUT THE BRIGADIER'S ATTENTION WAS WANDERING.

LOOK, BRIG, THESE DIGGERS AREN'T POMMY GUARDSMEN. MY BLOKES RESPECT A MAN BECAUSE HE'S A MAN, AND TO HECK WITH RANK!

WELL... IT'S ALL MOST DISCONCERTING, RUDGE... I SAY, IS THAT A DUG-OUT OVER THERE?







CAPTAIN PYM WAS NOT DISLOYAL. BUT HE HELD CERTAIN VIEWS ABOUT HIS COMMANDER, AND HE HAD A DUTY TO THE BRIGADE AS WELL AS TO HIS OWN UNIT...



COLONEL MACK HAD A HIGH REGARD FOR MAJOR RUDGE, I UNDERSTAND, CAPTAIN?

YES, I WAS THERE WHEN COLONEL MACK GAVE HIM COMMAND, SIR. THE OLD MAN WAS DYING... OF COURSE, I'M NOT SAYING HIS INJURIES HAD AFFECTED HIS JUDGMENT.

WHEN THE SHELLFIRE LIFTED, BRIGADIER DWYER WENT STRAIGHT TO HIS CAR. HE LEFT WITHOUT SPEAKING TO RUDGE...



THANK YOU, CAPTAIN PYM. PERHAPS YOU'D TELL MAJOR RUDGE THAT I'VE SEEN ALL I WANT TO SEE...

THE BRIG'S OFF, RUDGE... WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT?

NOTHING, SARGE... I'VE GOT MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

MEANWHILE, THE AFRIKA KORPS, PRESSING ON TOWARDS TOBRUK, WERE BRINGING UP ARMOUR AND ARTILLERY TO BREAK THE THIN ALLIED SCREEN ALONG THE ACROMA-EL ADEM LINE.

ACHTUNG...  
PANZER THREE...  
IN POSITION ON  
START LINE...



BEYOND THE RIDGE, THE FOURTH STOOD BY FOR THE INEVITABLE ATTACK. THE DAY AFTER BRIGADIER DWYER'S VISIT OF INSPECTION, TWO SIGNALS REACHED BATTALION HEADQUARTERS...

BRIGADE'S  
SENT OUR ORDERS,  
COLONEL... AND THERE'S  
A SECOND SIGNAL  
FOR YOU...

OKAY, PYM...  
CHUCK IT OVER...  
AND GIVE ME THE  
GIST OF THE  
ORDERS...





THE CAPTAIN TALKED WHILE RUDGE READ HIS SIGNAL. THE BIG MAN'S FACE SUDDENLY BECAME DARK WITH ANGER...

WE'RE TO MOVE FORWARD TO THE RIDGE WITH A BRIGADE GROUP, SIR... ACTING WITH THE GUNNERS...

YEAH...



THE SHELLING STARTED AGAIN THEN. RUDGE CRUMPLED THE SIGNAL BETWEEN HIS BIG HANDS. HE DROPPED IT ON THE SAND, AND GROUND HIS HEEL ON IT. SERGEANT TESTER WATCHED HIM...

YEAH... IF I KNOW JERRY, HE'LL PUT IN AN ATTACK AT DUSK... WE'D BETTER GET ORGANISED...

ANYTHING WRONG, RUDGE?



SERGEANT TESTER PICKED UP THAT CRUMPLED SIGNAL. HE READ IT TO THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY AS THEY MOVED UP TO THE RIDGE IN TRUCKS AN HOUR LATER.

SAY THAT AGAIN, SARGE. I DON'T BELIEVE IT...

IT STICKS IN MY GULLET, TOO. THAT POT-BELLIED, STIFF-NECKED BRIGADIER... HE'S RELIEVING THE COLONEL OF HIS COMMAND... HE'S SACKED RUDGE!



THE FOURTH TOOK UP ITS POSITION ON THE RIDGE SULLENLY. THEIR COMMANDER'S VOICE WAS HARSHER THAN USUAL...

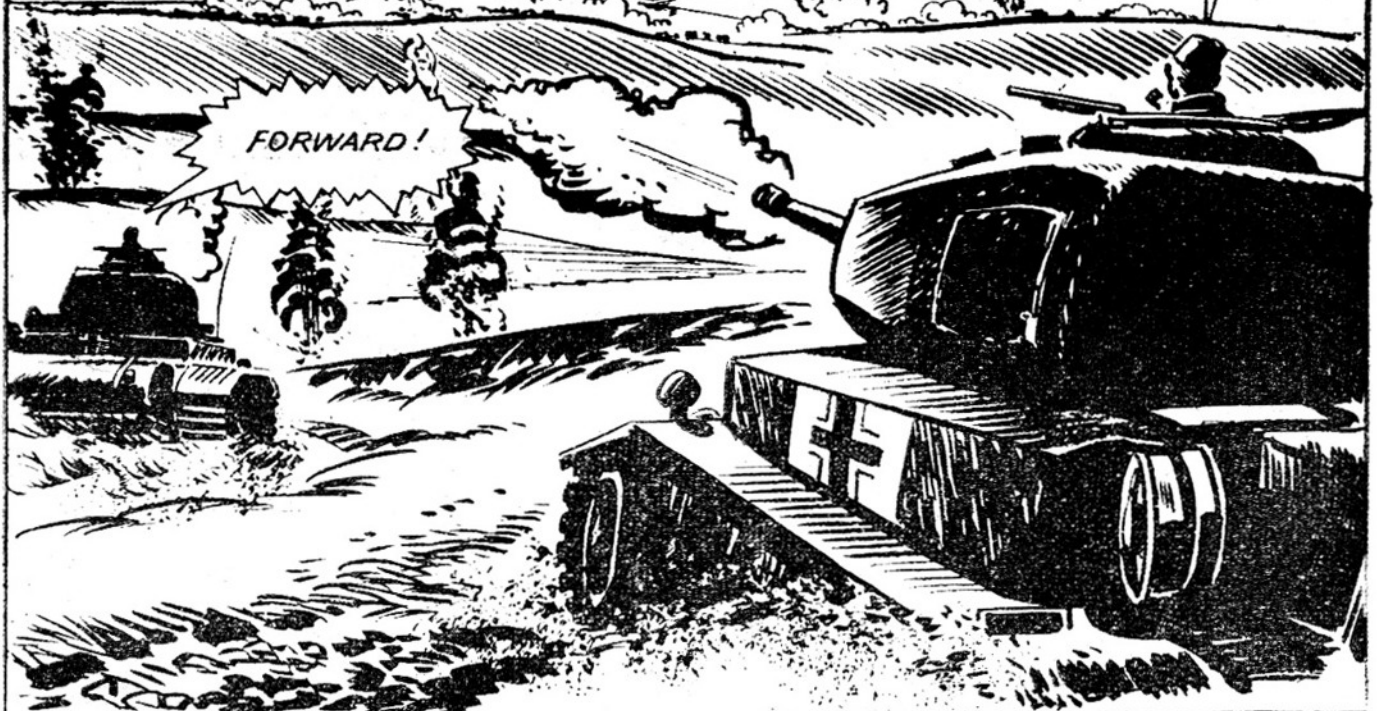
OKAY, SHAKE OUT...  
GUNS IN THE CENTRE...  
ANTI-TANK AND M.G.s ON  
THE FLANKS. DIG IN DEEP,  
YOU LOT AIN'T GOING  
NOWHERE!



TEN MINUTES LATER, THE GERMAN TANKS MOVED UP THROUGH THE SMOKE LAID BY THEIR ARTILLERY. THE BRITISH GUNS OPENED FIRE FROM THE RIDGE. THE ONE-SIDED BATTLE HAD BEGUN...

RAPID  
FIRE!

FORWARD!





AFTER THAT, THERE WAS NO TIME TO THINK OF THE BRIGADIER'S SIGNAL. THE FOURTH AND ITS COMMANDER WERE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES...



THE MARK IVs HALTED HULL DOWN BELOW THE RIDGE, HOSING THE AUSTRALIAN GUN POSITIONS WITH CANNONS AND MACHINE-GUNS. THEY BROKE THROUGH IN THE CENTRE HALF-AN-HOUR LATER.



RUDGE FOUGHT SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER WITH HIS MEN IN THE NEXT FORTY MINUTES, AS THE GERMAN TANKS THRESHED INTO THE AUSTRALIAN POSITIONS AND TRIED TO SMASH THEM WITH POINT-BLANK FIRE ...





THE GROUP HELD. WHEN THE STAFF CAR PULLED UP WITH SQUEALING BRAKES BELOW THE REVERSE SLOPE OF THE RIDGE, THE SURVIVING GERMAN TANKS WERE WITHDRAWING...



RUDGE WAS STANDING IN THE BROODING SILENCE WHEN LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN FOUND HIM.

GOOD AFTERNOON, COLONEL RUDGE. MY NAME IS BALCHIN. I'VE COME TO TAKE OVER COMMAND OF THE FOURTH FROM YOU.



BALCHIN WAS A STRAIGHT-BACKED ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, WITH A CLIPPED MOUSTACHE AND A THIN DRY VOICE. RUDGE CLENCHED HIS FISTS, LOOKING AT HIM...

YOU'RE CRAZY, MATE! WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIGHT. YOU CAN'T TAKE OVER FROM ME NOW!

THOSE ARE MY ORDERS, COLONEL. BRIGADIER DWYER WAS QUITE CLEAR ON THAT POINT.



RUDGE LOOKED AWAY. THE GERMAN TANKS WERE THRUSTING BACK TOWARDS THE RIDGE AND MEN OF THE FOURTH WERE DYING AGAIN, BUT BALCHIN'S VOICE WAS UNMOVED...

THE BRIGADIER'S ORDERS ARE FOR YOU TO RELINQUISH COMMAND AND RETURN TO HEADQUARTERS IMMEDIATELY, COLONEL RUDGE. THE CAR IS WAITING FOR YOU.

HECK!



RUDGE WALKED AWAY SAVAGELY...

OKAY! IF THAT'S THE WAY HE WANTS IT...

DON'T WORRY, RUDGE. I'LL PULL YOUR MEN THROUGH. ALL THEY NEED IS A FIRM HAND ON THE REINS.



A SPASM OF ANGER SHOOK RUDGE. THE MEN NEAR HIM THOUGHT HE WOULD SMASH HIS BIG CLENCHED FISTS INTO BALCHIN'S FACE. BUT HE WALKED AWAY. HE DID NOT LOOK BACK...

FACE YOUR FRONT, COBBERS - THAT'S WHERE THE ENEMY IS!

POOR OLD RUDGE!

YEAH, SARGE? ARE YOU SURE HE'S NOT DOWN THERE JUST READY TO TAKE OVER THE BATTALION?





## Chapter 3. *Retreat*

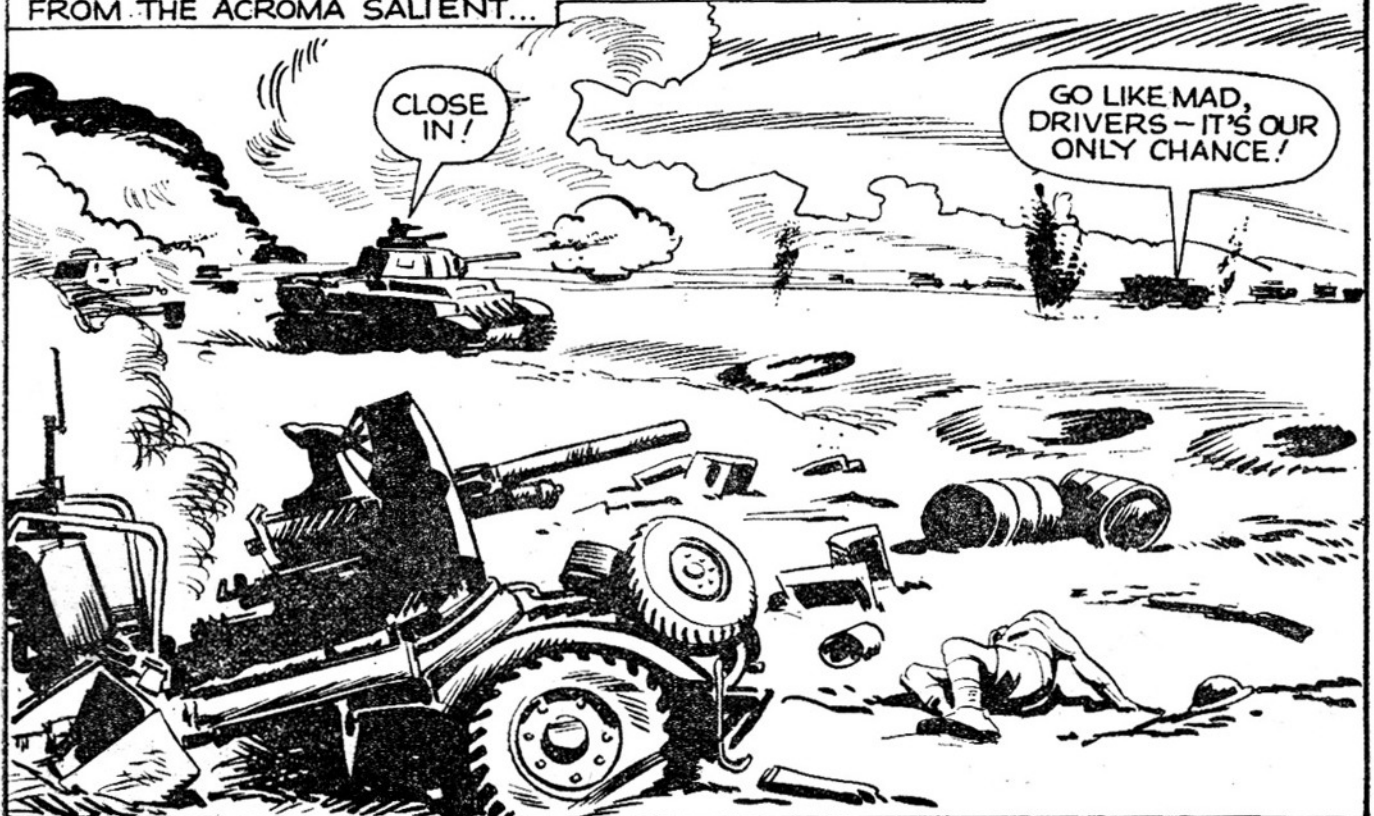
THE FIRST ORDER LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN GAVE TO THE FOURTH BATTALION, ON THE SHELL-TORN RIDGE THAT DAY AN HOUR AFTER HE HAD RELIEVED RUDGE, WAS AN UNFORTUNATE ONE ...



THE FOURTH OBEYED THE ORDER SULLENLY, DISENGAGING FROM THE GERMAN TANKS, LEAVING THEIR DEAD BEHIND THEM.



THAT FIRST ORDER WAS HARDLY BALCHIN'S FAULT. THE WHOLE OF THE EIGHTH ARMY, ITS LINES TURNED AGAIN BY ROMMEL'S FAST-MOVING PANZERS, WAS PULLING BACK FROM THE ACROMA SALIENT...



ON THE 20TH JUNE, TOBRUK FELL. TWENTY FIVE THOUSAND MEN WERE TRAPPED AND CAPTURED IN THE GUTTED PORT BY THE ADVANCING AFRIKA KORPS. ONLY A HANDFUL MADE THEIR ESCAPE...





BRIGADE PULLED THE FOURTH BATTALION BACK SIXTY MILES TO THE EGYPTIAN FRONTIER SOUTH OF SIDI OMAN. LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN GAVE THE DIRECT ORDERS...

THIS WILL DO, CAPTAIN.  
WE SHALL LEAGUER HERE.  
OUT OF THE TRUCKS,  
MEN! JUMP TO IT!

WHY DOESN'T  
HE BELT UP...



THE ORDERS BALCHIN GAVE HAD COME FROM A HIGHER AUTHORITY, BUT AS HE PASSED THEM ON, HIS MANNER WAS SHARP AND ARROGANT

WE MOVE AT DAWN,  
CAPTAIN. GET THE MEN  
ON THEIR FEET. NO  
SKULKING!

TO BLAZES  
WITH HIM!



THE AUSSIES OBEYED, BUT SIX DAYS OF CONSTANT RETREAT HAD ANGERED THEM. AND THEY HAD ANOTHER CAUSE FOR THEIR SULLENNESS...

WHY DID THEY TAKE RUDGE AWAY?

RUDGE WOULD HAVE KEPT US FIGHTING. THIS BLABBERMOUTH BALCHIN IS THE EXPERT AT RUNNING...

CAPTAIN! GET THE MEN OFF THE TRUCKS AGAIN!



THAT MORNING, LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN DECIDED TO GIVE THE BATTALION A PEP TALK.

BUT, SIR... WE CAN'T STOP HERE... IT'LL BE CLEAR DAY-LIGHT IN A FEW MINUTES AND THE JERRIES ARE RIGHT BEHIND US!

I HAVE GIVEN MY ORDERS, CAPTAIN. I WANT ALL THE MEN TO HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY. THEIR MORALE NEEDS STIFFENING.



THE FOURTH FELL IN REBELLIOUSLY, LIEUTENANT-COLONEL BALCHIN STOOD, STRAIGHT-BACKED, TO ADDRESS THEM...

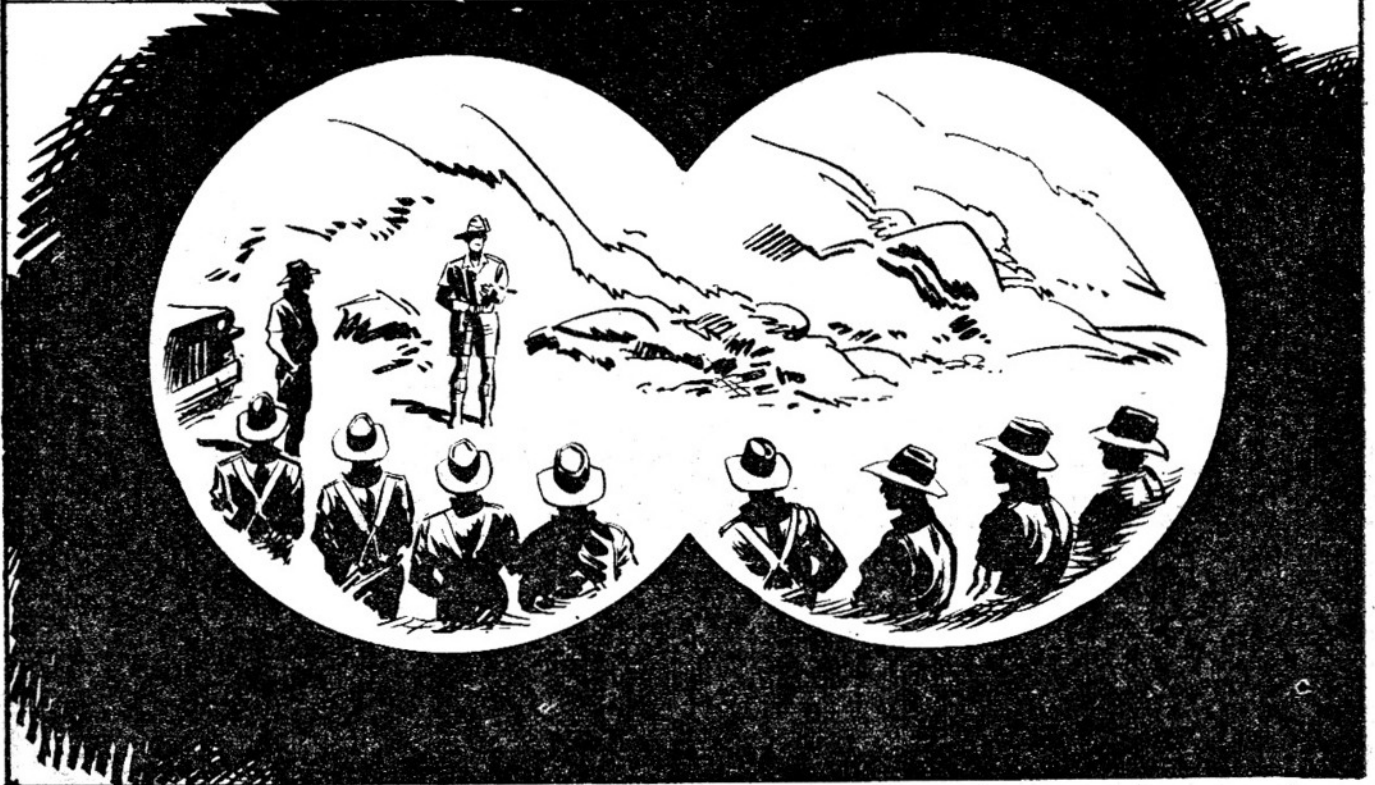
GET IN LINE THERE, MEN. SILENCE FOR THE COLONEL...

I'VE PUT UP WITH A GREAT DEAL OF INSUBORDINATION DURING THE LAST SIX DAYS, MEN. THAT'S GOING TO STOP HERE AND NOW!





BALCHIN WAS STILL TALKING CRISPLY WHEN THE SUN CAME UP. HE WAS CLEARLY VISIBLE THROUGH BINOCULARS FROM THE TOP OF A RIDGE THREE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY...



THE BINOCULARS BELONGED TO THE YOUNG GERMAN LEUTNANT IN CHARGE OF AN ADVANCE PATROL OF THE 21ST PANZER DIVISION.

AND YOU WILL OBEY ORDERS WITHOUT QUESTION. I DO NOT INTEND TO TOLERATE SLACKNESS. I INSIST ON HAVING DISCIPLINE...

ONE SPANDAU HERE... QUIETLY...



DRAWN UP IN SOLID RANKS, WITHOUT ARMS AND WITHOUT PICKETS, THE FOURTH LISTENED TO THE CLIPPED VOICE OF THEIR NEW COMMANDER...

WHAT YOU CHAPS NEED TO STEADY YOU IS DISCIPLINE. ONLY BY STRICT OBEDIENCE TO YOUR SUPERIORS CAN YOU HOPE TO SURVIVE...



SUDDENLY, THE HARSH RATTLE OF SPANDAUS CUT ACROSS BALCHIN'S VOICE. BULLETS ADDED A LEADEN FULL STOP TO HIS WORDS...

MY OATH! AMBUSHED!

YEAH - THAT'S WHAT DISCIPLINE DOES FOR YOU!





ANGERED AND FRUSTRATED BY THE ARROGANT LECTURE THEY HAD JUST BEEN GIVEN, THE AUSSIES LEAPT INTO ACTION. THE ATTACK WAS THEIR CHANCE TO ACT FOR A CHANGE...

AAGH!

OKAY, GRAB YOUR GUNS— YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO!

GOOD ON YOU, SARGE! WE'LL TAKE IT OUT ON THOSE SQUAREHEADS!

BUT LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN HAD BEEN GIVEN HIS OWN ORDERS, AND HE WAS A STICKLER FOR DISCIPLINE.

IT'S ONLY A SMALL PARTY ON THE RIDGE, SIR. WE CAN SURROUND THEM AND MOP THEM UP.

CERTAINLY NOT, CAPTAIN! MY ORDERS ARE TO RETREAT. I HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY.



THE SPANDAUS WERE TRAVERSING THE LEAGUER NOW, BUT THE ORDERS OF THEIR COMMANDER WERE MORE BITTER TO THE MEN OF THE FOURTH THAN THE GERMAN BULLETS...

ON THE TRUCKS, MEN. WE'RE NOT FIGHTING - COLONEL'S ORDERS!

WITHDRAW!

HECK! IF OLD RUDGE HAD BEEN HERE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT STORY.



THE YOUNG GERMAN LEUTNANT HAD EXPECTED A COUNTER-ATTACK. INSTEAD, THEY FACED ONLY WEAK AND BADLY-AIMED FIRE FROM THE BRENS AS THE TRUCKS LURCHED AWAY...

THE ENEMY RUNS, HERR LEUTNANT...

WE HAVE ROUTED A BATTALION WITH TWO GUNS AND FORTY MEN. THE BRITISHERS MUST BE BEATEN!

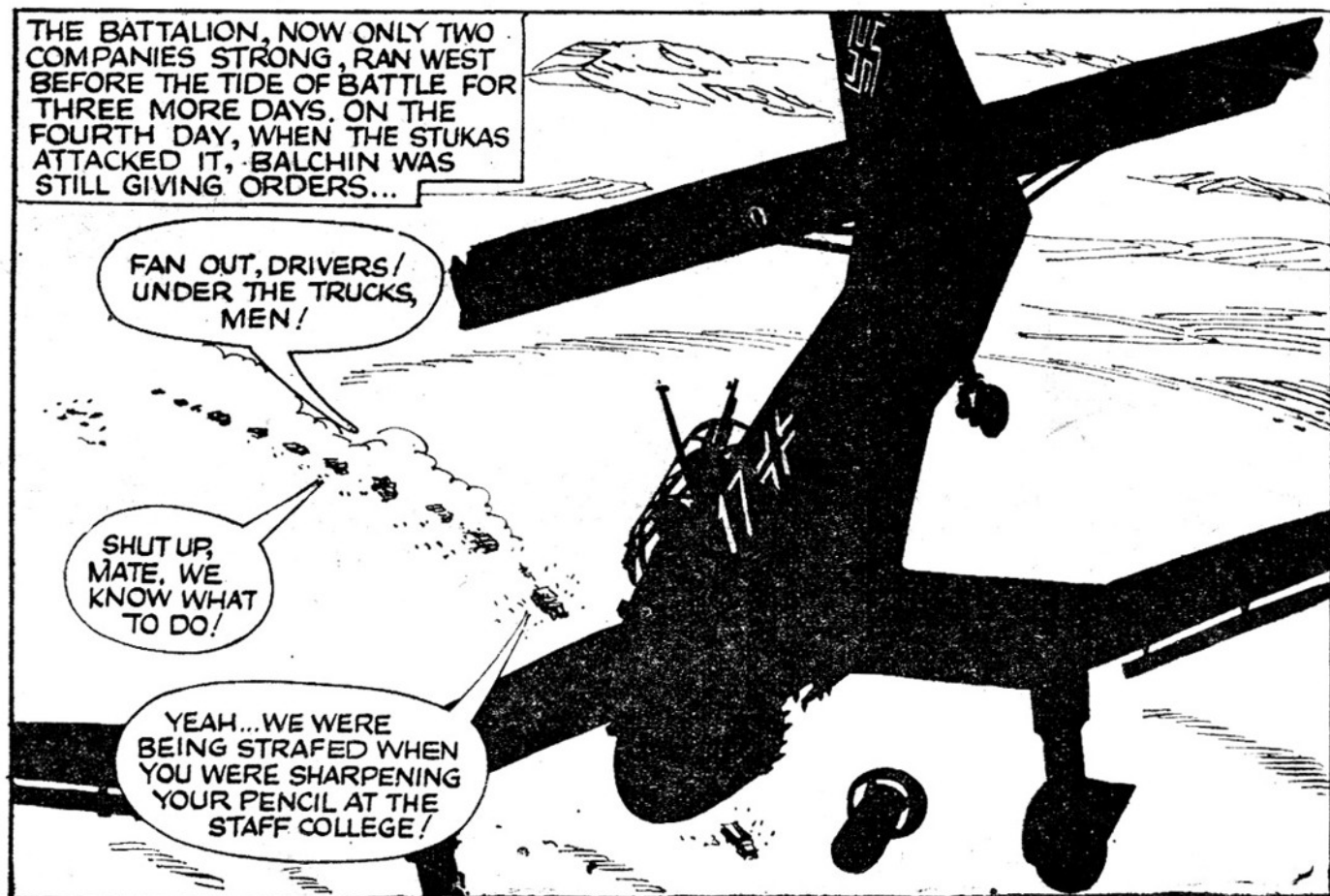




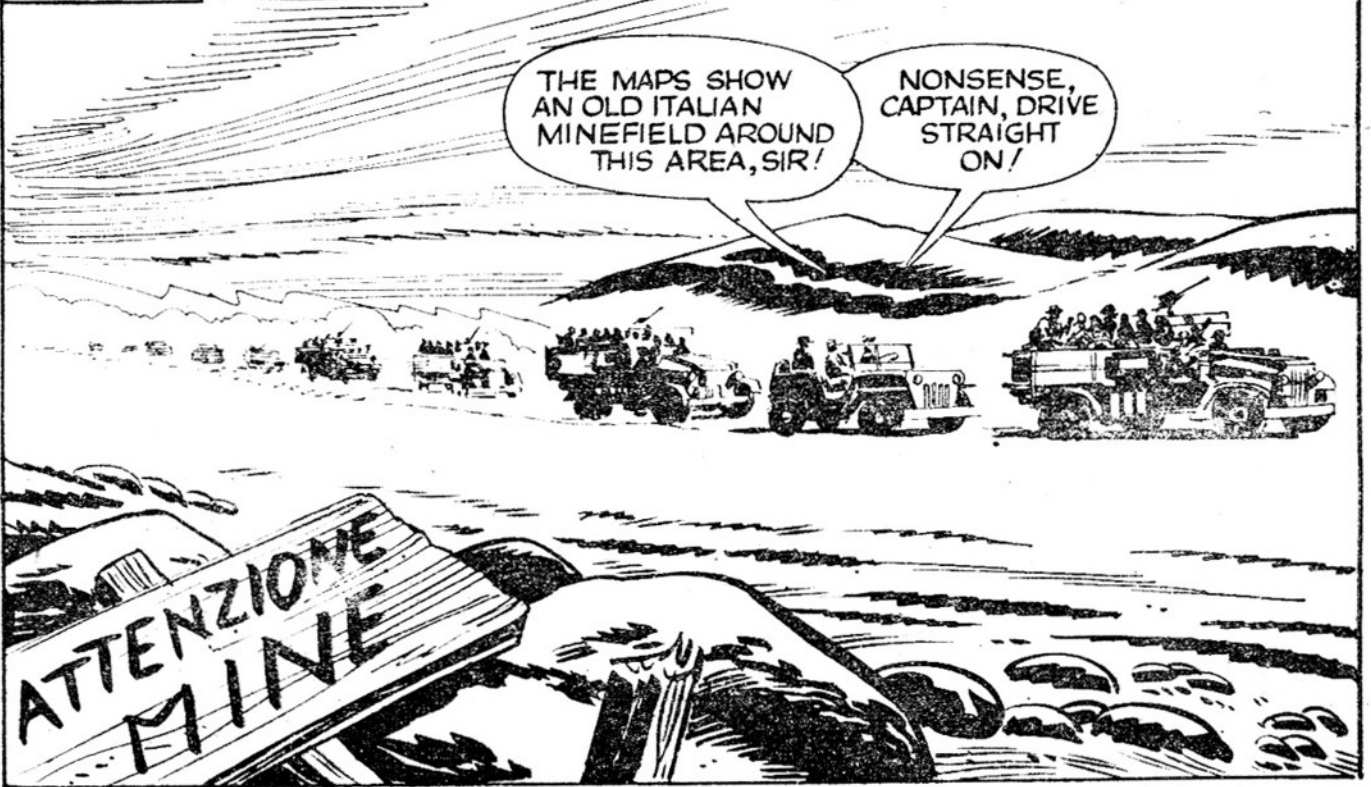
THAT WITHDRAWAL, INSTEAD OF A SHARP ATTACK TO CLEAR THE RIDGE, COST THE BATTALION AT LEAST FOUR TRUCKS AND EIGHTY MEN. IT DID NOT STOP LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN'S ORDERS...



THE BATTALION, NOW ONLY TWO COMPANIES STRONG, RAN WEST BEFORE THE TIDE OF BATTLE FOR THREE MORE DAYS. ON THE FOURTH DAY, WHEN THE STUKAS ATTACKED IT, BALCHIN WAS STILL GIVING ORDERS...



THE FOURTH SURVIVED THE STUKA ATTACK, BUT THEIR MOOD WAS TURNING UGLY, HEATED TO FLASH-POINT BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN'S ARROGANT ORDERS...



THE MINEFIELD HAD PROBABLY BEEN SOWN BY THE ITALIANS YEARS BEFORE. BALCHIN'S STUBBORNNESS GAVE IT ITS FIRST VICTIMS THAT DAY IN 1942...





EVEN THEN, WITH ONE TRUCK AND THIRTY MEN BLOWN TO PIECES AND ANOTHER OVERTURNED, BALCHIN SAT IN HIS JEEP GIVING ORDERS...

GO FORWARD ON FOOT, SOME OF YOU! FIND A CLEAR PATH OUT OF THE MINEFIELD!

DON'T YOU GET OUT, MATE—LEAVE SOMEONE ELSE TO DO THE DIRTY WORK!



IT TOOK THE AUSSIES THREE HOURS AND FIFTEEN MORE CASUALTIES TO FIND A WAY OUT OF THE MINEFIELD FOR THE TRUCKS. ALL THAT TIME, LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN SAT IN HIS JEEP...

GOOD GRIEF! THAT'S NOLAN OF B COMPANY, SIR—ONE OF THE BEST N.C.O.S WE HAD!

REGRETTABLE, CAPTAIN. BUT THAT IS A SOLDIER'S JOB, AS IT IS MY JOB TO COMMAND!

AAAGH!



WHEN THE JEEP ROLLED CLEAR OF THE MINEFIELD AND CAUGHT UP WITH THE MEN WHO HAD TRACKED THE PATH TO SAFETY, LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN BEGAN GIVING ORDERS AGAIN...



TEN MINUTES REST / AFTER THAT, BACK IN YOUR TRUCKS!

IT'LL TAKE US TEN MINUTES TO GET OUR DEAD AND WOUNDED OUT OF THAT MINEFIELD, DOOLEY!

I KNOW, MATES. BALCHIN'S GONE TOO FAR THIS TIME!

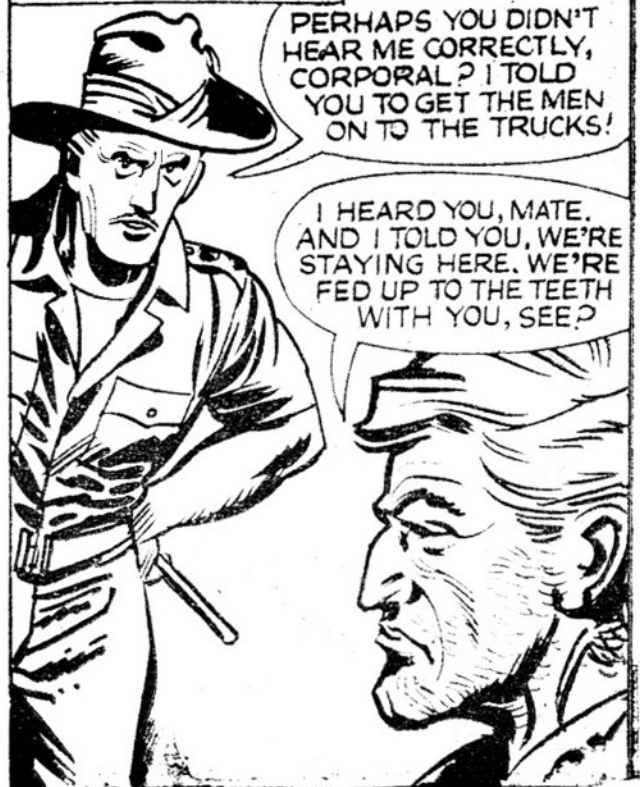
THERE WAS A NEW TONE IN THE MEN'S VOICES, HARSHER, MORE DANGEROUS. BALCHIN DID NOT NOTICE IT...

YOUR TEN MINUTES IS UP, MEN! SNAP TO IT! YOU, CORPORAL, GET THE MEN MOVING!



TO HECK WITH YOU, MATE... YOU AND YOUR TRUCKS AND YOUR ORDERS. ME AND MY COBBERS ARE STAYING HERE!

BALCHIN DREW HIMSELF UPRIGHT. HIS VOICE WAS LOUD, ARROGANT WITH ALL THE AUTHORITY THE ARMY HAD INVESTED IN HIM...



PERHAPS YOU DIDN'T HEAR ME CORRECTLY, CORPORAL? I TOLD YOU TO GET THE MEN ON TO THE TRUCKS!

I HEARD YOU, MATE. AND I TOLD YOU, WE'RE STAYING HERE. WE'RE FED UP TO THE TEETH WITH YOU, SEE?



## Hell's Heroes

BUT THERE WAS AUTHORITY IN CORPORAL DOOLEY'S VOICE, TOO. IT WAS THE AUTHORITY OF MEN WHOSE FATHERS TAMED A WILD CONTINENT AND BRED ITS FREEDOM IN THEIR SONS...

THIS IS MUTINY!  
YOU CAN'T DEFEY  
ME LIKE  
THIS...

WE'VE BEEN  
DEFYING JERRY  
FOR THREE YEARS,  
CHUM. DO YOU RECKON  
WE'RE SCARED OF A  
BLABBERMOUTH WITH  
A PUTTY SPINE AND A  
PIP AND CROWN  
ON HIS SHOULDER?

THERE'S A JEEP  
COMING, SIR...

BRIGADIER DWYER STEPPED FROM THE JEEP.  
HE WAS IN A HURRY...

I'VE GOT A VITAL MISSION  
FOR THE FOURTH, BALCHIN.  
GET YOUR MEN ON TO  
THEIR TRUCKS...

ER...  
YES  
SIR!



LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN TURNED RIGIDLY ON HIS HEEL. HIS VOICE WAS HIGH AND TAUT...

YOU HEARD THE BRIGADIER, MEN! I WANT YOU ON THOSE TRUCKS INSIDE TWENTY SECONDS!

GET LOST, MATE!



NONE OF THE AUSSIES MOVED. BALCHIN'S CONTROL FRAYED AND BROKE DOWN...

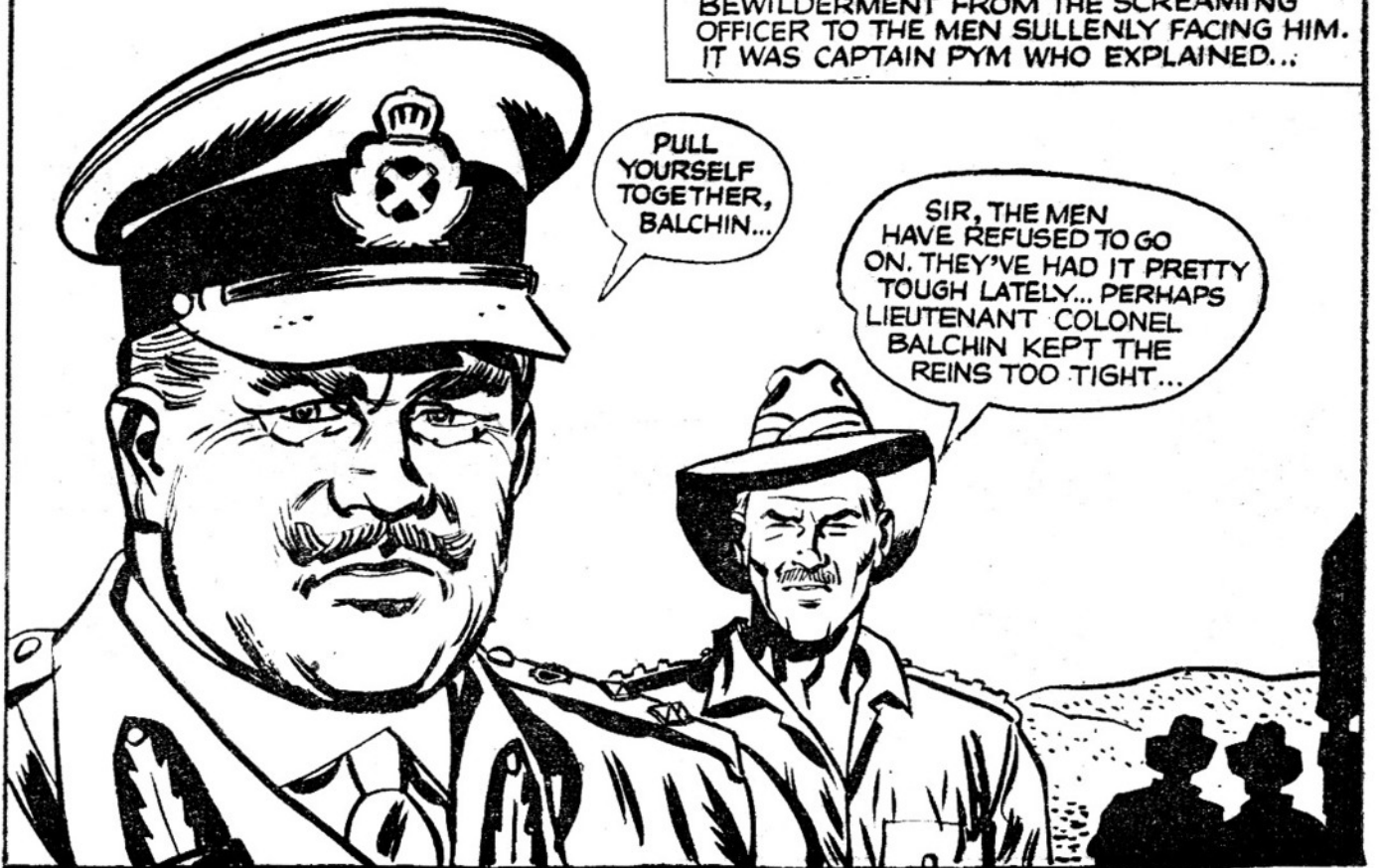
YOU'VE GOT TO MOVE - I'LL HAVE YOU SHOT, THE LOT OF YOU! MOVE, CURSE YOU - MOVE!



BRIGADIER DWYER LOOKED WITH SHOCKED BEWILDERMENT FROM THE SCREAMING OFFICER TO THE MEN SULLENLY FACING HIM. IT WAS CAPTAIN PYM WHO EXPLAINED...

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER, BALCHIN...

SIR, THE MEN HAVE REFUSED TO GO ON. THEY'VE HAD IT PRETTY TOUGH LATELY... PERHAPS LIEUTENANT COLONEL BALCHIN KEPT THE REINS TOO TIGHT...





BRIGADIER DWYER WAS A DISCIPLINARIAN, BUT HE WAS ALSO AN EXPERIENCED SOLDIER. HE KNEW THAT THERE WERE MORE WAYS OF ACHIEVING AN OBJECTIVE THAN BY BRUTE FORCE...

ALL RIGHT, CAPTAIN... WE'LL HAVE TO TRY ANOTHER WAY. YOU AND BALCHIN WILL COME BACK TO BRIGADE WITH ME!

RIGHT, SIR. GORDON, YOU'LL STAY HERE WITH THE MEN!



THE JEEP SWUNG EASTWARDS AWAY FROM THE SILENT, SULLEN AUSTRALIANS. AN HOUR LATER, A HIGH ESCARPMENT ROSE AGAINST THE SKY TO THE NORTH. DWYER POINTED TO IT...

YOU SEE THAT HIGH GROUND, CAPTAIN? IT OVERLOOKS THE MAIN TRACK ON WHICH THE EIGHTH ARMY WILL BE HEADING FOR OUR NEW DEFENSIVE POSITIONS IN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS' TIME...



THE HIGH ESCARPMENT LAY EMPTY AND SILENT IN THE GLARE OF THE SUN.

A SINGLE BATTERY OF JERRY EIGHTY-EIGHTS ON THAT ESCARPMENT COULD BOTTLE UP TWO-THIRDS OF OUR ARMY LONG ENOUGH FOR ROMMEL'S ARMOUR TO CATCH UP AND DESTROY IT...

SO YOU WANT THE FOURTH TO HOLD THAT HIGH GROUND TILL THE ARMY'S THROUGH. I SEE, SIR.



TWO HOURS HAD PASSED SINCE THEY HAD LEFT THE LEAGUER OF THE FOURTH. AT LAST THEY REACHED BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS...

BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THOSE MEN BACK THERE TO HOLD THAT RIDGE IF THEY WON'T OBEY ORDERS?



PERHAPS IT'S NOT JUST A MATTER OF OBEDIENCE, CAPTAIN, WE'LL SEE...

INSIDE THE COMPOUND, A PIONEER DETACHMENT WAS DIGGING A TRENCH ENERGETICALLY. THE BRIGADIER SPOKE TO A YOUNG STAFF OFFICER STANDING NEARBY...

LIEUTENANT... WHERE CAN I FIND COLONEL RUDGE?

HE'S OVER THERE, SIR... ON THE ANTI-TANK DITCH!

RUDGE!





THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE BIG AUSTRALIAN WHEN THE TWO OFFICERS APPROACHED THE ANTI-TANK DITCH, BUT THE PIONEERS THERE WERE DIGGING FURIOUSLY...



MY OATH, SIR... DO YOU THINK COLONEL RUDGE CAN GET THE MEN TO FOLLOW HIM?

IF HE CAN'T, CAPTAIN, NO-ONE CAN. COLONEL RUDGE!

RUDGE WAS DOWN IN THE DITCH, DIGGING WITH THE MEN. WHEN HE STRAIGHTENED UP, BRIGADIER DWYER ADDRESSED HIM STIFFLY...



CARRY ON, BLOKES... WELL, BRIG.

COLONEL RUDGE, I HAVE NEW ORDERS FOR YOU. THE FOURTH BATTALION IS OUT IN THE DESERT SOUTH OF MATRUH. I WANT YOU TO ASSUME COMMAND OF THEM!

STILL MUTTERING WILDLY  
TO HIMSELF, BALCHIN  
WAS BEING HELPED  
ACROSS THE COMPOUND...

SO THAT STUFFED  
DUMMY BALCHIN FELL  
DOWN ON THE JOB.  
YOU NEED THE FOURTH  
FOR SOMETHING  
SPECIAL, EH, BRIG?

CAPTAIN PYM  
WILL TELL YOU ABOUT  
THAT ON YOUR WAY.  
I THINK IT'S A JOB  
ONLY THE FOURTH  
CAN DO...

LOOKING AT RUDGE THEN,  
CAPTAIN PYM REALISED WITH  
A SHOCK HOW LEADERLESS  
HE HAD FELT SINCE THE FOURTH  
HAD LOST ITS COMMANDER...

FAIR ENOUGH, BRIG.  
WELL, PYM... LET'S  
GET STUCK IN...

YOU BET,  
RUDGE!





## Chapter 4. *The Salute*

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, A COMMAND JEEP CARRYING PYM AND RUDGE LIT OUT INTO THE DESERT AND HEADED WEST TOWARDS MATRUH...



THEY SKIRTED THE ESCARPMENT AN HOUR LATER. THE CAPTAIN HAD ALREADY OUTLINED THE SITUATION TO RUDGE...

WE'VE GOT TO HOLD THAT ESCARPMENT AT ALL COSTS.



TEN MILES SOUTHWEST OF THE ESCARPMENT, THE JEEP SUDDENLY RAN INTO A GERMAN PICKET POSTED AMONG THE SAND DUNES...



THE LIGHT MACHINE-GUN GOT IN A FIVE-SECOND BURST BEFORE RUDGE OPENED UP WITH HIS TOMMY-GUN. THE BIG MAN'S AIM WAS STEADIER THAN THE GERMANS'.

KEEP YOUR FOOT DOWN, COBBER! THERE'LL BE MORE OF THEM...

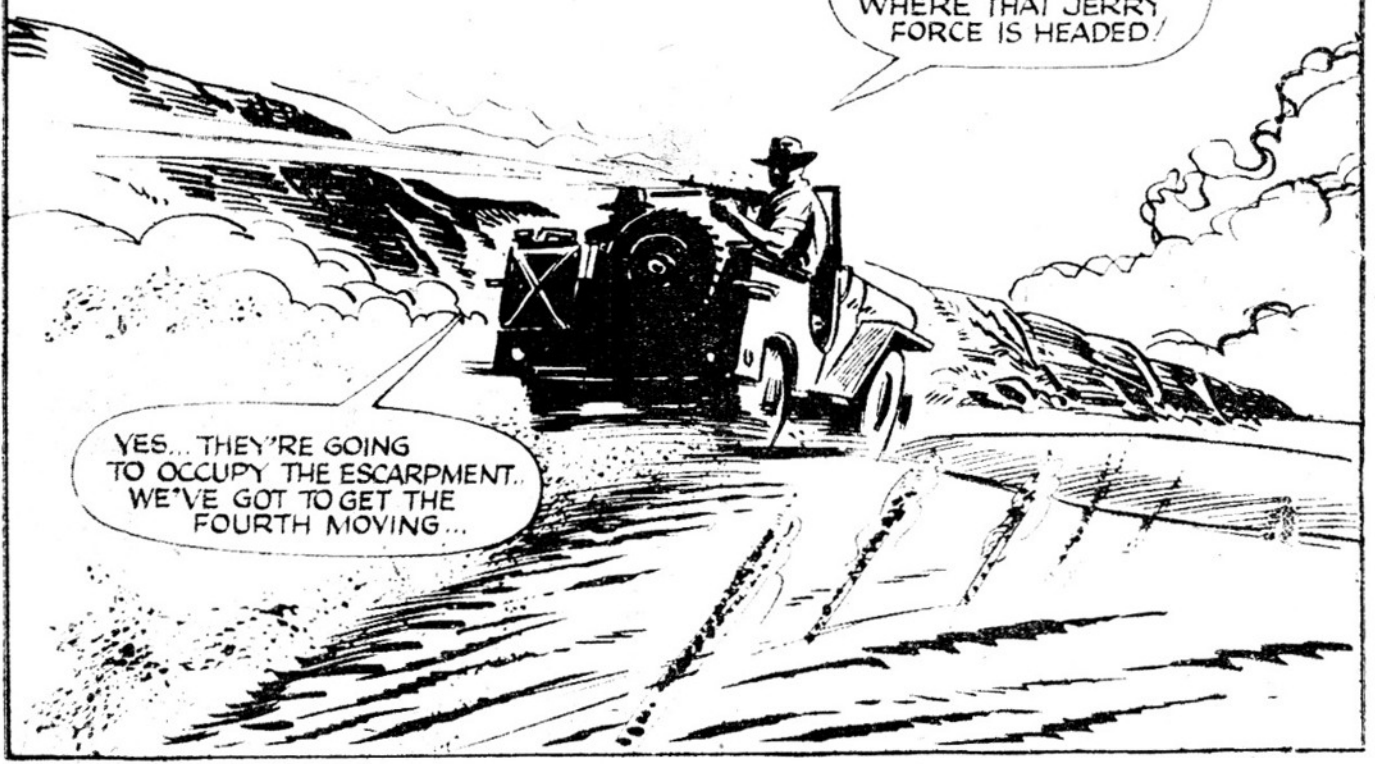
AAAGH!



THE JEEP SLAMMED THROUGH THE GERMANS AT SIXTY MILES AN HOUR WITH RUDGE'S GUN HAMMERING. DROWSY WITH SLEEP, CONFUSED, THE GERMANS WERE TOO SLOW TO STOP IT...

WE'RE THROUGH... BUT I RECKON I KNOW WHERE THAT JERRY FORCE IS HEADED!

YES... THEY'RE GOING TO OCCUPY THE ESCARPMENT. WE'VE GOT TO GET THE FOURTH MOVING...





BUT THE MEN OF THE FOURTH WERE STILL SPRAWLED SULLENLY IN THE SHADE OF THE TRUCKS AN HOUR LATER, WHEN THE JEEP REACHED THEM...

HEY, DOOLEY...  
MAYBE THE BRIG'S  
COMING BACK...

LET 'EM ALL COME...  
THEY'RE NOT GIVING  
ANY ORDERS TO THE  
FOURTH FROM  
NOW ON.



THEY RECOGNISED THE BURLY FIGURE IN THE JEEP WHEN IT WAS THREE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY. THEY SCRAMBLED TO THEIR FEET, BUT THEY DID NOT RUN TO GREET HIM...

OKAY, MATES...  
YOU CAN GET THE  
LEAD OUT OF YOUR  
BOOTS... I'M  
BACK...

IT'S  
RUDGE!

SO IT'S RUDGE.  
THAT DON'T ALTER  
THINGS...



BITTERNESS HAD EATEN DEEP INTO THE AUSTRALIANS. RUDGE SAW THAT IN DOOLEY'S HARSH SCOWL AS HE WALKED FORWARD...

IF YOU'VE COME TO DO THE BRASSHAT'S DIRTY WORK FOR THEM, RUDGE, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME. WE'RE NOT TAKING ANY MORE ORDERS!

I'VE BEEN HANDED A JOB TO DO, THAT'S ALL, DOOLEY. AND YOU LOT ARE GOING TO HELP ME...



WATCHING DOOLEY'S BITTER FACE AND THE SULLEN MOTIONLESS MEN BEHIND HIM, PYM THOUGHT THEN THAT RUDGE HAD FAILED...

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE US HELP YOU, RUDGE—SHOOT THE LOT OF US, LIKE THAT BLABBER-MOUTH BALCHIN SAID...

NO, COBBER. BUT YOU'RE GOING TO HELP ME, ALL THE SAME...



I DON'T NEED TO PULL RANK ON YOU, DOOLEY. I CAN LICK YOU OR ANY MAN IN THE FOURTH. PUT YOUR FISTS UP, MATE...

OKAY—YOU ASKED FOR IT!





ALL THE FRUSTRATION OF THE LAST NINE BITTER DAYS WAS IN THE FIST THAT DOOLEY SWUNG AT RUDGE THEN, IT KNOCKED RUDGE SPRAWLING...



PYM HEARD THAT YELL. HE HEARD THE ANGER IT RELEASED IN THOSE TOUGH AND TURBULENT MEN...AND HE KNEW THEN WHY RUDGE WAS FIGHTING...

IT WAS ACTION THOSE MEN NEEDED, AND RUDGE WAS GIVING IT TO THEM. ALSO, HE WAS CLAIMING HIS RIGHT TO LEAD THEM... THE ONLY WAY THEY RESPECTED, WITH HIS FISTS...



DOOLEY CAME TO  
AFTER TWENTY  
LONG SECONDS.

OKAY, RUDGE...  
YOU WIN... I RECKON  
WE'LL HELP YOU DO  
THAT JOB, IF THAT'S  
THE WAY YOU  
WANT IT.

GOOD ON YOU,  
COBBER... THAT'S  
THE WAY I WANT  
IT!



CAPTAIN PYM KNEW THEN, AS THE  
AUSSIES RAN TO THEIR TRUCKS, THAT  
RUDGE WAS A BORN LEADER OF  
MEN...

WELL, PYM MATE...  
MAYBE THE ARMY MANUAL  
WOULDN'T INCLUDE THAT AS  
A METHOD OF GETTING YOUR  
MEN TO MOVE... BUT IT  
WORKED!

IT WORKED  
ALL RIGHT,  
COLONEL  
RUDGE!





AN HOUR LATER, THE GERMAN BATTLE GROUP DIGGING IN ON THE ESCARPMENT SAW THE CLOUD OF DUST APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH...



THE FOURTH FORMED ITS SKIRMISH LINE UNDER GUNFIRE AT THE FOOT OF THE ESCARPMENT. THE MEN KNEW WHAT THEY HAD TO DO...



THE AUSTRALIANS WENT UP THE SLOPE DOGGEDLY INTO THE GERMAN CROSSFIRE FROM THE CREST. THERE WAS NO COVER. ALL THEY HAD WAS THEIR COURAGE AND THEIR GUNS AND THE BIG MAN TO LEAD THEM...

COME ON,  
YOU  
BLOKES!

KEEP IN  
LINE WITH  
RUDGE,  
COBBERS!



THE MAIN ATTACK HAD BEEN PINNED DOWN BY THE SPANDAUS WHEN CAPTAIN PYM AND HIS COMPANY GAINED THE FLANK. PYM WASTED NO TIME...

RIGHT, MEN,  
LET'S GO!

OKAY, MATE—  
WE'RE ON  
OUR WAY!





THE SPANDAUS SWUNG ON PYM AND HIS COMPANY, BUT AT THAT MOMENT RUDGE SWEEPED HIS MAIN ATTACK FORWARD. THEIR AIM DIVIDED, THE GERMANS FALTERED...



FROM TWO SIDES, THE AUSTRALIANS FLOODED OVER THE GERMAN DEFENCES. THE FIGHT WAS HAND TO HAND NOW, AND NO MACHINE-GUNS COULD FEND OFF THE FOURTH...



BEFORE DARKNESS FELL THAT NIGHT, THE ESCARPMENT WAS IN THE HANDS OF COLONEL RUDGE AND THE TWO HUNDRED MEN WHO STILL REMAINED OF THE FOURTH BATTALION...

LET'S GET DUG IN, MEN. WE'RE HERE NOW... AND WE'RE GOING TO STAY...



AT FIRST LIGHT NEXT MORNING, THE AUSTRALIANS SAW THE EIGHTH ARMY TRANSPORT ON THE ROAD TO THE NORTH, HEADING EASTWARDS TO EL ALAMEIN...

THERE THEY GO, COBBERS... AND WHILE WE'RE UP HERE, THEY'LL KEEP GOING...

HEY, RUDGE... OVER THERE—DUST CLOUDS!



THERE WAS NO NEED TO IDENTIFY THOSE VEHICLES MAKING DUST TO THE SOUTH. THE SHELLS BEGAN TO PLUNGE TOWARDS THE AUSTRALIAN POSITIONS MINUTES LATER...

JERRY'S GOING TO CHUCK THE LOT AT US, BLOKES. BUT WE'RE STAYING PUT TILL OUR TRUCKS HAVE STOPPED ROLLING ON THE ROAD BEHIND US.





## Hell's Heroes

SO THE SAVAGE POUNDING OF THE FOURTH BATTALION BEGAN. FIRST THE GUNS, THEN THE INFANTRY...

GIVE IT TO 'EM, MEN!

NEW MAG, GIL!

AAAGH!



THE LUFTWAFFE MADE THREE STRIKES ON THE AUSTRALIANS THAT DAY. THE BOMBS PLASTERED THE HIGH GROUND. THE SAND HEAVED AND FOXHOLES BECAME MERE SHALLOW PITS AMIDST THE BOMB CRATERS...

STICK IT, BLOKES!







## Hell's Heroes

THAT NIGHT, THE GERMANS BROUGHT UP HEAVIER ARTILLERY TO POUND THE AUSTRALIAN POSITION ON THE HIGH GROUND. THE FOURTH BATTALION HAD ALMOST CEASED TO EXIST NOW...



ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS A HANDFUL OF ROUGH-TONGUED MEN WHO WOULD NOT BE PUSHED AROUND, AND THE BIG MAN WHO KNEW HOW TO HANDLE THEM...



AT DAWN, THE AUSTRALIANS WERE STILL ON THE ESCARPMENT, AND THE LAST OF THE EIGHTH ARMY'S TRANSPORT WAS HEADING SAFELY EASTWARD ALONG THE ROAD TO EL ALAMEIN.



TEN MINUTES LATER, TOO LATE, THE GERMANS THREW IN A FRESH ATTACK. AS THEY FLOODED ACROSS THE BROKEN CREST, THE AUSTRALIANS ROSE TO MEET THEM FOR THE LAST TIME...





A DOZEN MEN STOOD SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THEIR COLONEL IN THAT LAST BATTLE ON THE BLOODSTAINED SAND. THE FOURTH WENT DOWN FIGHTING...



FOUR MONTHS LATER, AT EL ALAMEIN, ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS WOULD BE DEFEATED BY THE EIGHTH ARMY. IN THE GREAT VICTORY, THE FOURTH HAD ALREADY PLAYED ITS PART...



THE WORLD MIGHT NEVER KNOW THE PART THAT SMALL BAND OF AUSTRALIANS HAD PLAYED, THE MANY WHO HAD DIED, AND THE FEW WHO LIVED...



THAT DAY, ON THE HIGH SAND FOR WHICH THEY HAD FOUGHT SO BRAVELY, THE MEN OF THE FOURTH BATTALION RECEIVED THEIR TRIBUTE ...





THE GERMAN COMMANDER LOOKED AT LIEUTENANT COLONEL RUDGE. HE DID NOT KNOW THAT THE BIG MAN WAS A HARD CASE, TOUGH AND HORNY-HANDED. HE KNEW THAT IT WAS A BORN LEADER OF MEN HE SALUTED...



Printed in England by Messrs. Percy Brothers Ltd., Manchester 1, and published each month by Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch Ltd. South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd. Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. Kingstons Ltd. WAR PICTURE LIBRARY is sold subject to the following conditions, that it shall not, without the written consent of the Publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition, or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

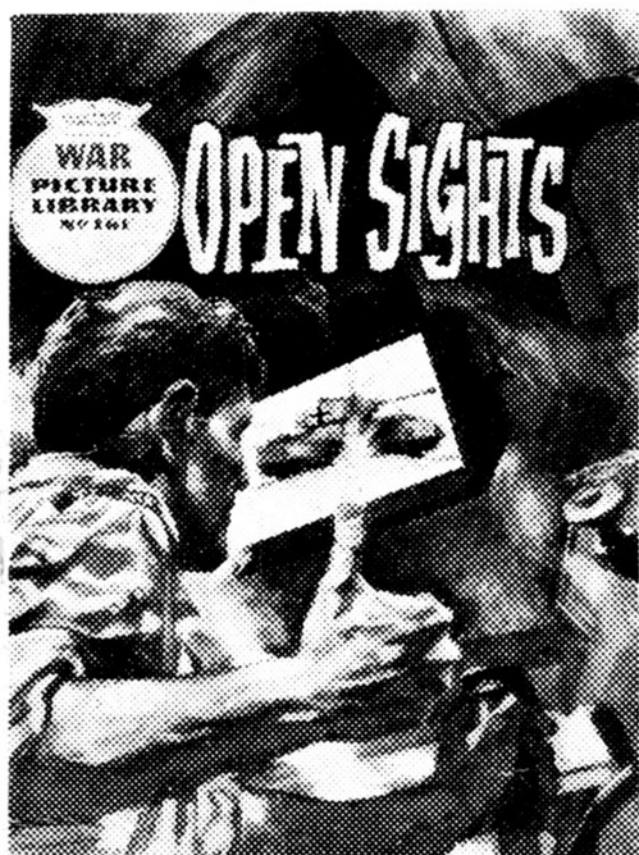
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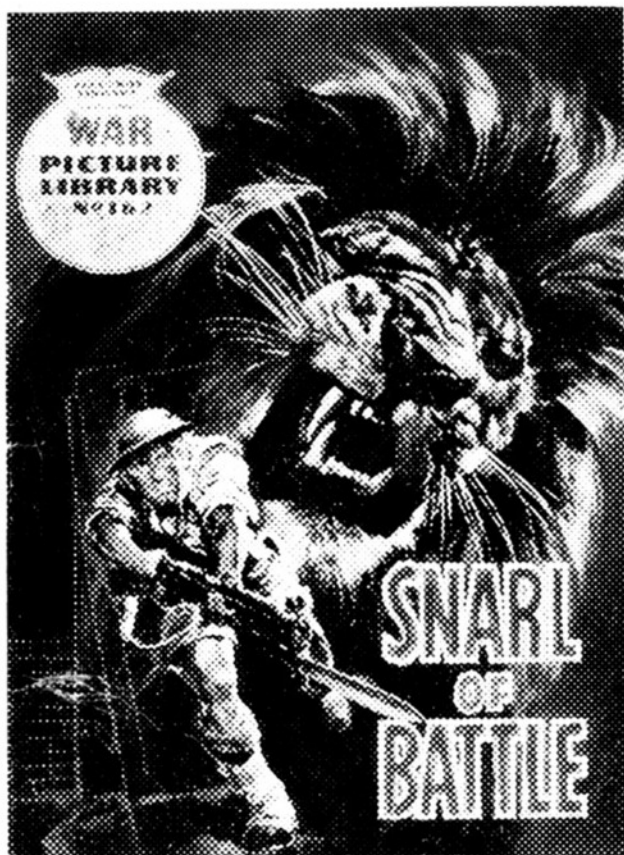
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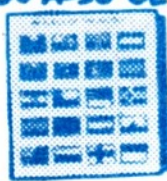
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